150 years of forecasting for the nation

1 August 2011 - The Met Office is celebrating 150 years of forecasting for the nation as it marks the anniversary of the first ever weather forecast appearing in print.

Starting with the lines "general weather probable in the next two days", the short piece which appeared in The Times in 1861 was a bold move which started forecasting as we know it today.

It was put together by Robert FitzRoy, a captain in the Royal Navy and a pioneer in the field of meteorology who headed up the department which later became the Met Office.

John Hirst, Chief Executive of the Met Office, said: "We're extremely proud of our long heritage and to be marking this landmark anniversary of forecasting for the nation.

"Ever since our humble beginnings, the Met Office has been a pioneer in the science of meteorology. Forecasting the very variable British weather is always testing but by facing that test every day we have established a reputation around the world as being amongst the very best at what we do.

"Most of all, we're proud to have stayed true to our origins by forecasting what the weather has in store to help safeguard lives and property."

To mark the event, the Met Office is launching a photo competition asking the public to put forward pictures which define weather moments of 2011 so far, as well as a timeline of major events in forecasting over the last 15 decades.

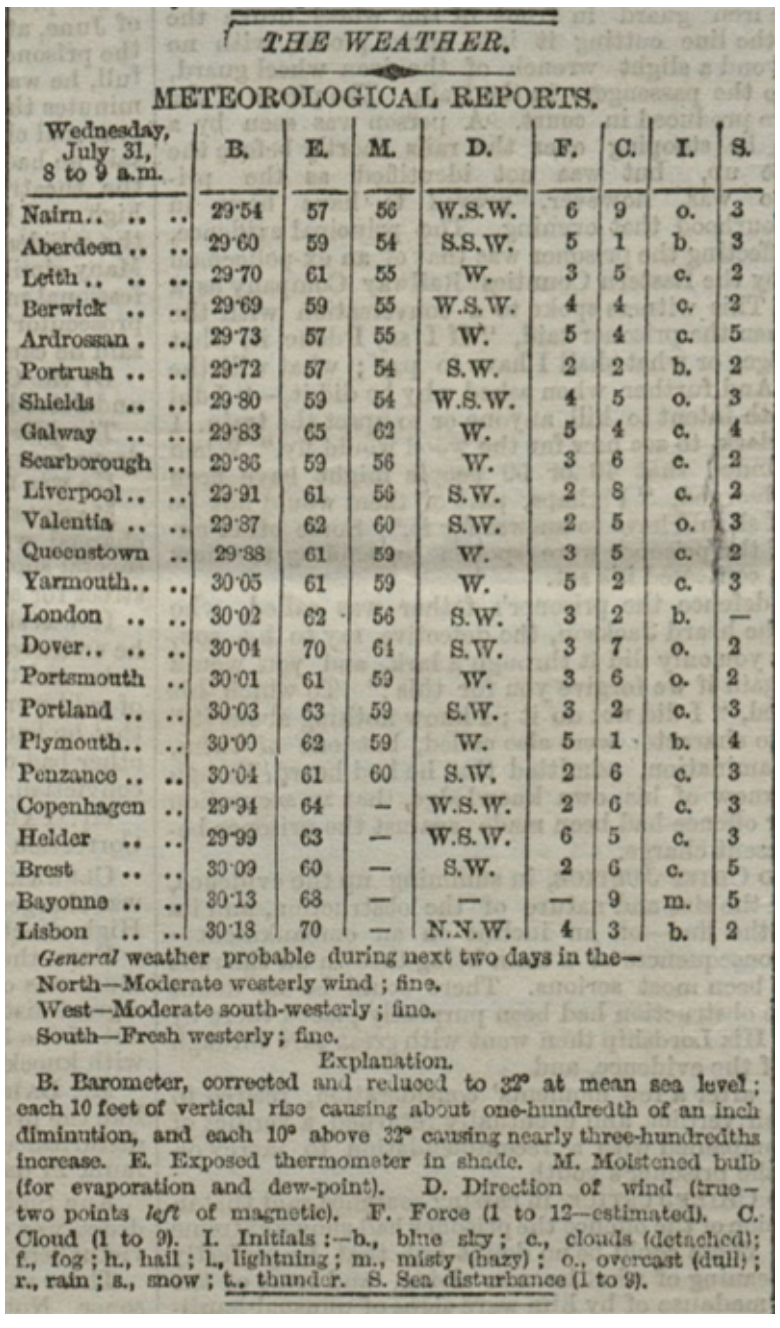
The inspiration for FitzRoy's first forecast came from the desire to protect life and property. In 1859 a storm wrecked the ship Royal Charter and many others, costing the lives of hundreds of people.

He believed this kind of event could be forecast in advance - giving people the necessary time to prepare. This belief led to his first public forecast in 1861.

Celebrating 150 years of forecasting for the nation transcript (PDF, 104 kB)

Since then forecasting has stayed at the forefront of scientific and technical development, embracing advances such as chaos theory, supercomputers, satellites, and even mobile internet to transform the way forecasts are created and delivered.

During that time forecasts have had a huge impact - from advising of a weather window for the D-Day landings to giving advance warning of the terrible floods in Cumbria in November 2009.



THE WEATHER.

METEOROLOGICAL REPORTS.

Wednesday, July 31, 8 to 9 a.m.	B.	E.	M.	D.	F.	C.	I.	S.
Nairn..	29·54	57	56	W.S.W.	6	9	o.	3
Aberdeen	29·60	59	54	S.S.W.	5	1	b.	3
Leith	29·70	61	55	W.	3	5	c.	2
Berwick	29·69	59	55	W.S.W.	4	4	c.	2
Ardrossan . ..	29·73	57	55	W.	5	4	c.	5
Portrush	29·72	57	54	S.W.	2	2	b.	2
Shields	29·80	59	54	W.S.W.	4	5	o.	3
Galway	29·83	65	62	W.	5	4	c.	4
Scarborough ..	29·86	59	56	W.	3	6	c.	2
Liverpool	29·91	61	56	S.W.	2	8	c.	2
Valentia	29·87	62	60	S.W.	2	5	o.	3
Queenstown ..	29·88	61	59	W.	3	5	c.	2
Yarmouth.. ..	30·05	61	59	W.	5	2	c.	3
London	30·02	62	56	S.W.	3	2	b.	—
Dover..	30·04	70	64	S.W.	3	7	o.	2
Portsmouth ..	30·01	61	59	W.	3	6	o.	2
Portland	30·03	63	59	S.W.	3	2	c.	3
Plymouth.. ..	30·00	62	59	W.	5	1	b.	4
Penzance	30·04	61	60	S.W.	2	6	c.	3
Copenhagen ..	29·94	64	—	W.S.W.	2	6	c.	3
Helder	29·99	63	—	W.S.W.	6	5	c.	3
Brest	30·09	60	—	S.W.	2	6	c.	5
Bayonne	30·13	68	—	—	—	9	m.	5
Lisbon	30·18	70	—	N.N.W.	4	3	b.	2

General weather probable during next two days in the—
North—Moderate westerly wind ; fine.
West—Moderate south-westerly ; fine.
South—Fresh westerly ; fine.

Explanation.

B. Barometer, corrected and reduced to 32° at mean sea level ; each 10 feet of vertical rise causing about one-hundredth of an inch diminution, and each 10° above 32° causing nearly three-hundredths increase. E. Exposed thermometer in shade. M. Moistened bulb (for evaporation and dew-point). D. Direction of wind (true—two points *left* of magnetic). F. Force (1 to 12—estimated). C. Cloud (1 to 9). I. Initials :—b., blue sky ; c., clouds (detached) ; f., fog ; h., hail ; l., lightning ; m., misty (hazy) ; o., overcast (dull) ; r., rain ; s., snow ; t., thunder. S. Sea disturbance (1 to 9).

The first daily weather forecast, The Times, 1 Aug 1861

150 years of forecasting for the nation photo competition

150 years of forecasting for the nation timeline

History of the Met Office

Contact information

Met Office Press Office: **+44 (0)1392 886655**

E-mail: Press Office

Met Office Customer Centre: **01392 885680**

If you're outside the UK: **+44 1392 885680**

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Met Office

Met Office celebrates 150 years of forecasting for the nation

On the 1st August, 2011, the Met Office will be celebrating 150 years of forecasting for the nation. To help celebrate, we'll take a look at the history of the Met Office and some of the key events along the way.

150 years ago, on the 1st August 1861, the first daily weather forecast was published in the Times. This was published by Vice-Admiral Robert FitzRoy, who achieved lasting fame as the captain of HMS Beagle during Charles Darwin's famous voyage. A pioneering meteorologist, he set up the Met Office as part of the Board of Trade in 1854. Convinced he could forecast the future weather, he set about publishing his daily weather forecasts in the national press in 1861. His was applauded for his efforts abroad but in the UK it was a different story. Whenever he got a forecast wrong, he was ridiculed and was the butt of jokes.

On 30 April, 1865, Fitzroy died. A year later his forecasts ceased Daily but following pressure from the shipping industry, politicians and the press, they resumed in 1867. By 1879 his public forecasts had resumed as well. We all rely on the tv and weather forecasts we see and hear on a daily basis. The first BBC radio weather bulletin was broadcast back on the 14th November 1922. This involved an announcer reading a script prepared by a Met Office forecaster.

TV weather forecasts reached us in 1949, but it wasn't until 1954 that the first Met Office Weather Presenter George Cowling, appeared live on our screens. Unlike modern weather forecasts we see today, with high tech graphics and chroma key technology like I'm in front of today, George Cowling relied on a weather map, a pencil and a rubber to show what the weather would be doing tomorrow.

Today, the partnership between the Met Office and broadcasters is still going strong. Daily forecasts began on 26th March 1923 and a forecast has been heard or seen on television or radio almost every day since. The exception was during World War II, when radio forecasts were suspended in case they helped the enemy.

Another iconic weather forecast you may have heard of is the shipping forecast. This began in October 1925 and it has become a British institution since. The Met Office produced these shipping forecasts on behalf of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and covers 31 sea areas from south eat Iceland in the north, to Fitzroy in the south.

The weather affects us day by day, but one of our weather forecast changed history. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, may have 'thanked the gods of war' for the timing of the D-Days landings, but it was accurate weather forecasts that was responsible for the successful assault on the Normandy beaches on 6th June, 1944.

Conditions were unsuitable on 4th June. One German commander is reported to have returned home for his Wife's birthday, convinced no invasion fleet could launch. But at a vital meeting on 5th June, Eisenhower's Chief Meteorologist, Group Captain Sir James

M. Stagg, forecast a brief improvement in the weather for 6th June. The rest is history. Today, our Mobile Met Unit supports UK and allied forces during operations, ensuring the safety of military staff.

Throughout the history of the Met Office there have been some key weather events that have shaped our history. One of the most memorable was the Great Storm of 1987.

On the 16th October, hurricane force winds battered parts of southern England, blowing down trees, cutting off power and sadly killing 18 people. The Great Storm was remarkable for its ferocity. Gusts exceeded 100mph in places and was the worst storm to hit the UK for over 200 years. As a result the National Severe Weather Warning Service is established to provide warnings to the general public to protect life and property from the effects of severe weather.

In July 2007 the UK experienced widespread flooding which threatened life and property. The Met Office produced some of the most detailed heavy rain warning ever. In response to the wide spread flooding the Met Office set up the Flood Forecasting Centre in partnership with the Environment Agency. Combining the expertise of both organisations, the role of the Flood Forecasting Centre is to deliver ever more detailed flood warnings. The benefits of this partnership were clearly seen during the terrible floods in Cumbria in 2009 where advanced warning provided vital time for agencies to prepare.

The Met Office is continuing to deliver weather forecasts to the nation through our website, on TV and Radio and in newer ways such as our website widget and mobile phone applications such as our popular iPhone app.

We can see how the weather has shaped the history of this country and how over the last 150 years, the Met Office has been forecasting for the nation, providing key weather information when it matters. To find out more about what we do, check out our website.